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IS LIBERATION POSSIBLE?

by James Eliot Cross

In an article published shortly after the announcement of Stalin's fatal illness, Walter Lippmann pointed up clearly the immense difficulties that must accompany a transfer of power under the Russian system of government. Inevitably an effective succession will be a hard and lengthy business, presenting a harsh test to a system which was never designed to absorb this type of strain.

The tensions and pressures of the succession period will be particularly evident in the relations of Soviet Russia to her satellite states. The slightest slackening of the imperial grasp will have enormous significance for these unhappy colonies, and the effects of any confusion or conflict at the center of the system will be vastly magnified at the outer fringes.

This lends a new importance to the current discussions in this country on the liberation of the captive countries. Liberation is now an avowed and major objective of American foreign policy. It was referred to by Republican spokesmen before the election, and Secretary of State Dulles has made it clear that he has not forgotten the promises of the campaign. He has reiterated his belief that the Iron Curtain can be pushed back without violence or war, and stated that those who doubt the efficacy of moral pressures and propaganda "just do not know what they are talking about." Speaking by recording to the General Assembly of the National Council of Churches in Denver he said:--

> Dynamism can find proper expression only in moral and spiritual terms. . . . No Iron Curtain of the Despots, no cringing policies of the fearful, can prevent moral and spiritual forces from penetrating into the minds and souls of those under the ruthless control of the Soviet Communist structure.

These last are, of course, sentiments which no free man would deny.

A number of the leaders of the new Administration, therefore, feel that Soviet authority in the satellite states can be seriously shaken and possibly destroyed by internal liberation movements, and that such

movements can be assisted by this country without resulting in a general war. How violent such movements may be is in the realm of speculation; the gist is that the victims of Soviet rule can achieve freedom by measures which they themselves initiate.

In all the discussion, little distinction has been made between the two forms of liberation involved. The first is liberation from Soviet control that will follow either the defection of the present puppet government from the Soviet orbit or its overthrow by Communists defiant of Moscow's authority. The other is liberation from Communism itself. This can be accomplished only if the country escapes from the bloc and sets up a non-Communist government.

The concept generally accepted in America today seems to be that after a successful liberation movement the Russians will depart, taking with them Communism and all its works, while a regime more considerate of human life and dignity arises to take their place. It is historically consistent that we think in this way. We gained our national freedom and our statehood only at the end of a long and bitter liberation movement; and with the convenient exception of the American Indian, we have always sympathized with peoples fighting alien intrusion and occupation.

To this must be added the fact that as the strains and costs of world leadership are borne in on us, we tend to look about for political and military assets somewhat more eagerly than used to be the case. The lessons of World War II reaffirmed the long-known fact that suppressing resistance movements is an expensive and trying business. The Communists are again demonstrating the truth of this in Southeast Asia, to the distress of our allies in that part of the world. Under these circumstances the line of reasoning is obvious. Operations that now hurt us can hurt the Communists if directed against them, and their unhappy satellite holdings seem to be a promising spot to turn the tables and to wage irregular war on our terms.

By definition a liberation movement, as distinct from a resistance movement, must lead to the absolute removal of the enemy and not merely the disruption of his system of control in the area. A resistance movement may be successful if it increases the enemy's difficulties in conducting his occupation and to some extent deprives him of the fruits of his initial victory. Resistance activities can keep the soul of an occupied people alive and are costly and demoralizing for the occupier to cope with, but they are not bound to seek a clear-cut decision, while a liberation movement must achieve just that.

There are few, if any, examples in modern history of liberation movements succeeding against an occupying power that is capable of bringing force to bear against the revolt and willing to do so. This last is an important qualification. The Sinn Fein operations in Ireland from 1918 up to the treaty in 1921 nearly nullified British control in that country, but a major factor in the final result was the general disapproval in Britain of the methods adopted by the police and the military in combating the uprising. The government was naturally reluctant to continue an operation so unpopular, both with the electorate at home and with the world at large.

We faced a similar problem when the Philippine Insurrection broke out in 1899. The guerrillas had no outside support, but the nature of the operation required of the American Army to suppress them made the whole business so disliked at home that it became an issue in the next year's presidential election. Aguinaldo, the Philippine leader, could not succeed in the field, but a section of American public opinion came close to gaining his victory for him. All manner of committees and associations were created to protest the Administration's policies. Mr. Dooley quite fairly described our government as an "indulgent parent kneelin' on th' stomach of his adopted child, while a dillygation fr'm Boston bastes him with an umbrella."

In both cases the chances for successful liberation were greatly improved by external influences. Note, however, that these influences could only operate against an occupying government subject to the pressures of public opinion. The situation differs radically where a liberation effort seeks the overthrow of a totalitarian regime which has no regard for domestic opinion and little enough for foreign views. Such a state is free to throw its full coercive power into the suppression of the uprising. Naked force is the instrument. Throughout history this has been the immediate reaction of the authoritarian mentality. Charlemagne is reputed to have executed 4500 Saxons in a single retributive measure; Goya left eloquent testimony to Napoleon's reactions to resistance in Spain; and the blood of Lidice is still fresh in the world's memory.

Brute force can be cloaked in many disguises, including the various forms of quisling and puppet governments. But always in the background are the reality of the physical power of the occupiers and the certainty that it will be ruthlessly applied if things do not go according to instructions.

The power of the occupying authoritarian state is not limited to mere military saturation. It supplements the military arm with a number of equally effective coercive instruments. The most obvious is a system of secret police. There are few people in America who have a true conception of how stifling and paralyzing this instrument can be when mercilessly used. Its unlimited authority to arrest and punish creates a situation of terror which in itself is a highly effective weapon. Agents provacateurs, planted to prey on the eager and unwary, networks of informers placed throughout the population, the use of friend against friend and of child against parent, are all common techniques. They are not intended solely to rout out enemies of the state; they also tear down the bases of trust and confidence between individuals. Without trust, conspiracy and even normal human communication become impossible.

The endlessly repetitious propaganda that the totalitarian state pours out upon its subjects may carry conviction to a portion of them. The rest do not believe, but the ceaseless pounding tends to produce a political exhaustion and apathy which well serves the purposes of the regime. Some victims develop a protective numbness--a very different thing from the spirit of revolt.

The economic power of the Communist state is another strong suppressive instrument. As a matter of policy the material independence of the individual is destroyed, and wealth exists only as a prerogative of official position or approval. The citizen holds no assets of his own and is constantly aware that his very survival depends on his continuing in the good graces of the state. Positive resistance thus becomes appallingly difficult, both from a physical and a psychological point of view.

The potential resister or liberator in a country under occupation by the U.S.S.R. finds that all power and all means of achieving power have been drawn into Russian hands. Limited or token powers are, of course, meted out to trusted or controlled representatives, the leaders of the nominally independent national Communist parties. Events in Poland and Czechoslovakia have shown how little true authority is delegated.

How then can liberation come to an occupied area except in the course of a general war?

First, the occupying power may decide that the satellite is simply not worth the difficulty of holding and administering it. The geographic location may decide this; or the inherent instability and lack of potential of the area may make the whole venture appear unprofitable. The Romans in Britain apparently made this decision when they relinquished the Scottish conquests of Agricola and set the permanent frontier at Hadrian's Wall. Something like this might occur today with Albania, but that situation is probably unique. The other satellites have direct land contact with the U.S.S.R. The Red Army is close by, and the dangers resulting from the loss of any one of them to influences outside of the Communist bloc would be so great and so immediately evident that Russia would make every effort to prevent the loss.

Second, there may be a sharp decline of power at the heart of the occupying state. War or cleavages within the system may so weaken the government that it can no longer control the empire that it earlier subjugated. Rebellious moves within the occupied areas then become possible, and finally the occupier may be expelled. The wars of liberation in the South American countries provide reasonably good examples of this situation. Spain, racked and weary from the Napoleonic occupation, was then torn with internal political rivalries. Her forces in the New World naturally reflected these conditions, and as trouble developed they were unable to look for adequate help from home. The revolutionary movements which a few generations before would have been quickly suppressed proved too powerful to be contained.

If symptoms of a comparable weakness are ever observed in a Soviet satellite that Russia seriously wishes to retain, they will indicate trouble somewhere much nearer the true seat of power. World attention will probably pass over the goings on in the satellite. All eyes will be on Moscow and the disintegration of the power structure that has permitted such a situation to arise.

A third way in which a satellite might break away from the Soviet complex is by a Tito-type revolt. This is not a strictly accurate term, for the Russians never wrested full control of Yugoslavia from Tito, and he remained master in his own house to an extent that no other satellite leader has found possible. However, if the U.S.S.R. ever should permit sufficient actual control of the machinery of power to center in a supposedly puppet government, that government might well attempt to escape from her irksome and, for the leaders, downright dangerous rule. It is also possible that a puppet regime might split within itself, with dissatisfied elements seeking to seize power and to swing the country over to the West. If the move is to succeed, the leaders must have a reliable hold on the army and the police. Furthermore, they must have an economy that will not crumble when its tie with that of the Soviet bloc is broken off. Tito just got by on the last count, and his position is still far from happy. Nevertheless, he succeeded. The army and the police were his personal creations from the wartime days, and there was a sufficiently large nationalist Communist party to give him the necessary political backing. Thus, while his move was an audacious one, he had a grasp on the elements of power that he needed both to rule and to protect him from his own former rulers.

Tito's very success makes it unlikely that the Russians will ever permit their other minions the degree of self-sufficiency needed to make such a move practicable. If a similar break is attempted, the Russian reaction doubtless will be far sharper and heavier than in 1948.

The possibility of Titoist separations presents a complicated variation to the double-barreled American hope for liberation from both Russian domination and the curse of Communism. The appearance of any further truly independent national Communist states would seriously weaken Russia's political and military position. The psychological effect on world-wide Communist unity would be drastic, and major objectives of U.S. policy would be furthered. The hitch is, of course, that this would not provide liberation in the individual sense of which we instinctively think. The people would still live in under a Communist regime, and their leaders, shaky and uncertain/their newfound independence, would be highly reluctant to weaken the instruments of control through which they have been accustomed to rule. So long as these instruments are in existence, the citizen is still far from achieving what we Americans conceive to be personal freedom.

Therefore, if another satellite regime or elements within it attempt a break, we must make a far-reaching policy decision. A national defection today will have little chance of success without prompt and massive aid from the West. The scale of assistance required cannot be foreseen, for it will depend on the scale of the Russian effort to recapture the truant. Will we accept the great danger of war and give our aid? Will we later live with the fugitive state, whose methods of government are probably antithetical to our own? Or will we hold out for the abolition of Communism and all its works?

The fourth form a liberation movement can conceivably take is that of internal non-Communist conspiracy and revolt. Insurrections of this sort face tremendous difficulties. They must start from scratch, undermine or overwhelm the national Communist elements [illegible] its.

There can be only one attempt. Effective leadership for an anti-Communist movement must come from a small percentage of the population, and if that group is dissipated and the rest of the population disillusioned, this generation is not likely to see a similar effort.

A movement of this sort obviously will need support from the outside to counterbalance the power of the state. The amount of help required and the danger of war involved will again depend on the Soviet reaction. It can be argued that such a liberation movement will be a purely domestic effort, and that Western support can be delivered on a secret basis, but unfortunately this is not so. The scale of support needed to ensure success against determined opposition must be such that pretenses of secrecy and neutrality will be even less convincing than the present contention of the Chinese that their men in Korea are informal volunteers. The realities of the situation will be evident throughout. The supporting state will have to accept the risks of general war that accompany open participation.

It is of no immediate import to the leaders of a Communist police state that they and their policies are cordially hated by a majority of their subjects. The system is designed to operate without voluntary support and to absorb stresses set up by popular disaffection. Resentment and despair may be widespread, foreign anti-Communist propaganda may be loud and persuasive, but the regime remains secure so long as the discontent is denied effective expression. Popular resistance against a Communist regime, if undertaken without the means of pushing through to liberation, may cause the Russians some difficulty and expense, but it will probably prove fatal to the irreplaceable patriots who attempt it. This last is unfortunately true regardless of whether the resistance is essentially passive or involves outright guerrilla war. Any anti-Communist word or move is an act against the state. The secret police mentality is not concerned with comparatives in crimes and punishments.

If the United States encourages and supports a liberation movement we shall, in effect, be presenting the U.S.S.R. with an ultimatum. Either the Russians relinquish the satellite in question or we will make it untenable for them. The heart of the strategy must be the assumption on our part that the Soviet leaders will choose to let the region go rather than fight a major war to retain it. This is the calculated risk on which rest all plans for furthering liberation, violent or otherwise.

If the risk of such actions appears to be prohibitive for the near future, it does not follow that we cannot reach out to the enslaved peoples who share, a thousand times intensified, our own desire for their liberation. We dispose far-reaching radio outlets. More important, messages of deep appeal still travel the mysterious grapevines that form the basic communications channels of all peoples under all conditions.

We can emphasize to them that our conception of our own interest now embraces their future in a way never envisaged at Versailles and Yalta. The peoples of the satellites are acutely aware of their perilous position between East and West. Tides of Teutonic or Russian ascendancy have swept over them for centuries, and this generation has been overwhelmed by both in turn. Thus for them the removal of their present masters is but a first

and incomplete objective; the opportunity to achieve regional integrity and security within the framework of a renewed Europe is the true goal. A realization that the U.S. has an acknowledged and permanent interest in maintaining a stable Europe will go far to stimulate political thought and to preserve the vision of freedom in these areas. The survival of that vision is essential, for no future governments can arise without it. For the present we can do few things that will contribute more to this than to present our positions and policies in terms that are understandable to the people we seek to aid. Here we must remember that we speak as a temporal power. We must not confuse our political standards and policy objectives with religious ideals in which the Soviet's victims may find fulfillment through understanding, acknowledgment, and even martyrdom. "Freedom," as T. E. Lawrence expressed it, "is a pleasure only to be tasted by a man alive."

We would be poor students of history if we forgot the tyrannies of the past that have collapsed or been brought down in ruins. While strengthening and documenting our conviction in the ultimate triumph over Soviet totalitarianism, it is vitally important that we be guided by sober judgment of fact and not let our native optimism get the better of us. We may all too easily lead ourselves to anticipate events and our friends to attempt the impossible.